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Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
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Note verbale dated 22 December 2000 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the United Nations Secretariat

The Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations and has the honour to request that the attached working paper of Japan be circulated as an official document of the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (see annex).

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Annex

Working paper submitted by Japan outlining its basic position on the action plan for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

Japan strongly hopes that the UN Conference next year will serve as a decisive turning point for the international community in its fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. For this purpose, efforts will have to be made at the Conference to mobilize the political will of all participating states to come up with a meaningful final document which should include an action plan. This working paper contains Japan's basic views as to the important components and a broad outline of the possible measures to be included in the action plan. Japan will provide more detailed views on the components of the action plan at a later date.

1. Basic norms or guidelines

(1) One of the important components of such an action plan should be a set of norms or guidelines for combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. These should include, for example:

(1) Pledges by states to place strict controls on the manufacture of such weapons and on export/import procedures
(2) Strict observance of embargoes imposed by UN Security Council resolutions
(3) Tight restrictions on the influx of such weapons to regions in conflict
(4) Storage, under guard, of excess weapons to avoid theft and diversion, with their eventual destruction as far as practicable.
(5) Promotion of global and regional cooperation among police, customs and border-control authorities

(2) Because of its policy of prohibiting the export of weapons, Japan is in the unique position of being able to support almost any global or regional measure to control the export of such weapons. On the other hand, the right of all states to acquire such weapons for legitimate defense and security purposes must be duly respected. Therefore, in formulating the above norms or guidelines, a careful balance will have to be worked out. Japan believes that the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's reports A/52/298 and A/54/258 should serve as a useful basis for this purpose inasmuch as they were adopted by consensus among governmental experts appointed on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, and were subsequently endorsed by General Assembly resolutions.

2. Transparency

Another important component of the action plan will be transparency measures related to the manufacture, trade, possession, disposal and so forth of such weapons. In the future, consideration might be given to marking weapons as a way of combating and discouraging illicit

trade. Some useful recommendations in this regard are already contained in the Secretary-General's report A/54/258.

3. Cooperation and assistance

(1) The third component of the action plan should contain practical measures to be taken by the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and states in a position to do so to assist those states and regions seriously affected by the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of such weapons in their efforts to disarm, demobilize and re-integrate former combatants (DDR). Such measures should include the collection and destruction of weapons. A region-specific and integrated approach combining disarmament and development efforts will be required. Ongoing efforts in various regions will have to be strengthened considerably, and ways will have to be worked out to ensure their sustainability over extended periods of time. Coordination of all such activities must be improved.

(2) In recent years, Japan has been stepping up its efforts in this field by supporting various related activities of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations; it is also engaged in bilateral development assistance activities in affected regions. Japan is willing to further intensify such efforts in cooperation with the United Nations, international regional organizations and other interested states.

4. Follow-up mechanism

As to the follow-up mechanism of the Conference, a periodic review will be essential in view of the nature of the problems related to the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons. In this regard, Member States, as well as international and regional organizations are requested to provide the United Nations with information on their respective activities on a regular basis so as to make periodic reviews more effective.

5. Others

On the question of the participation of NGOs, Japan believes that they should be permitted to observe all the sessions of the Preparatory Committee and the Conference itself, and to present their views during a session or sessions set aside for them. Their cooperation is absolutely necessary in raising awareness as well as in combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.